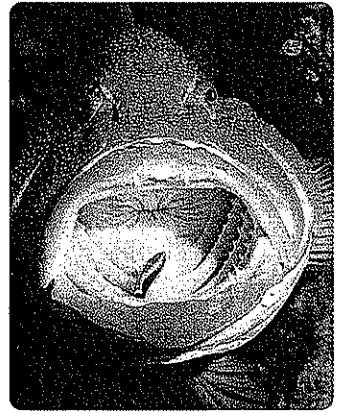


# Coral Reef Creatures

Warm, sunlit waters and lots of hiding places attract many creatures to a coral reef. In a reef ecosystem, there is a great variety of creatures. In fact, there are more kinds of animals in coral reefs than in any habitat on Earth except rain forests.

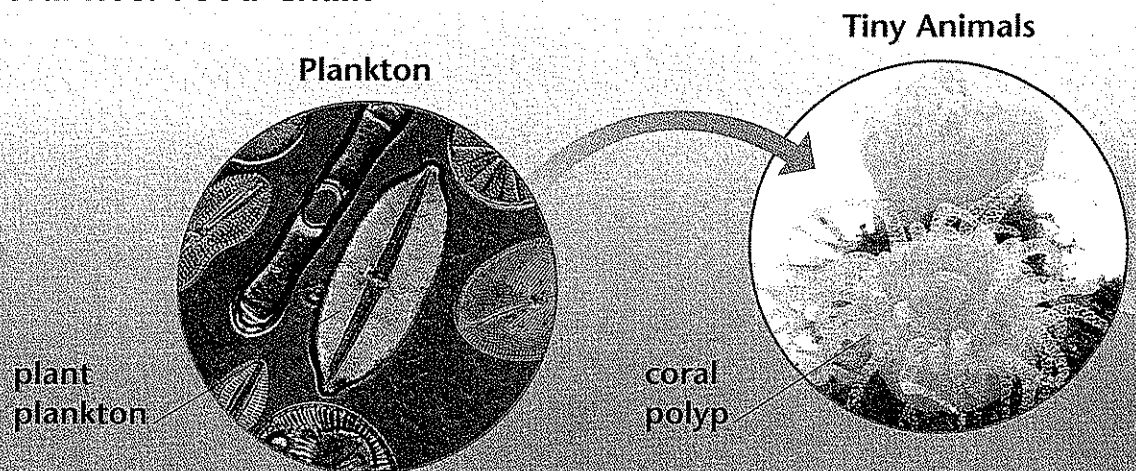
With all that sea life, there's much activity. Some fish feed on the coral polyps or graze on algae and plankton. Bigger fish feed on smaller fish. Every creature looks for a meal. Luckily, a variety of sea life means there is something for everyone.



## Cleanup Crew

Certain small fish nibble **parasites**, and food bits off big fish. This is all part of the reef food chain. Here, a small wrasse feeds in the mouth of a grouper.

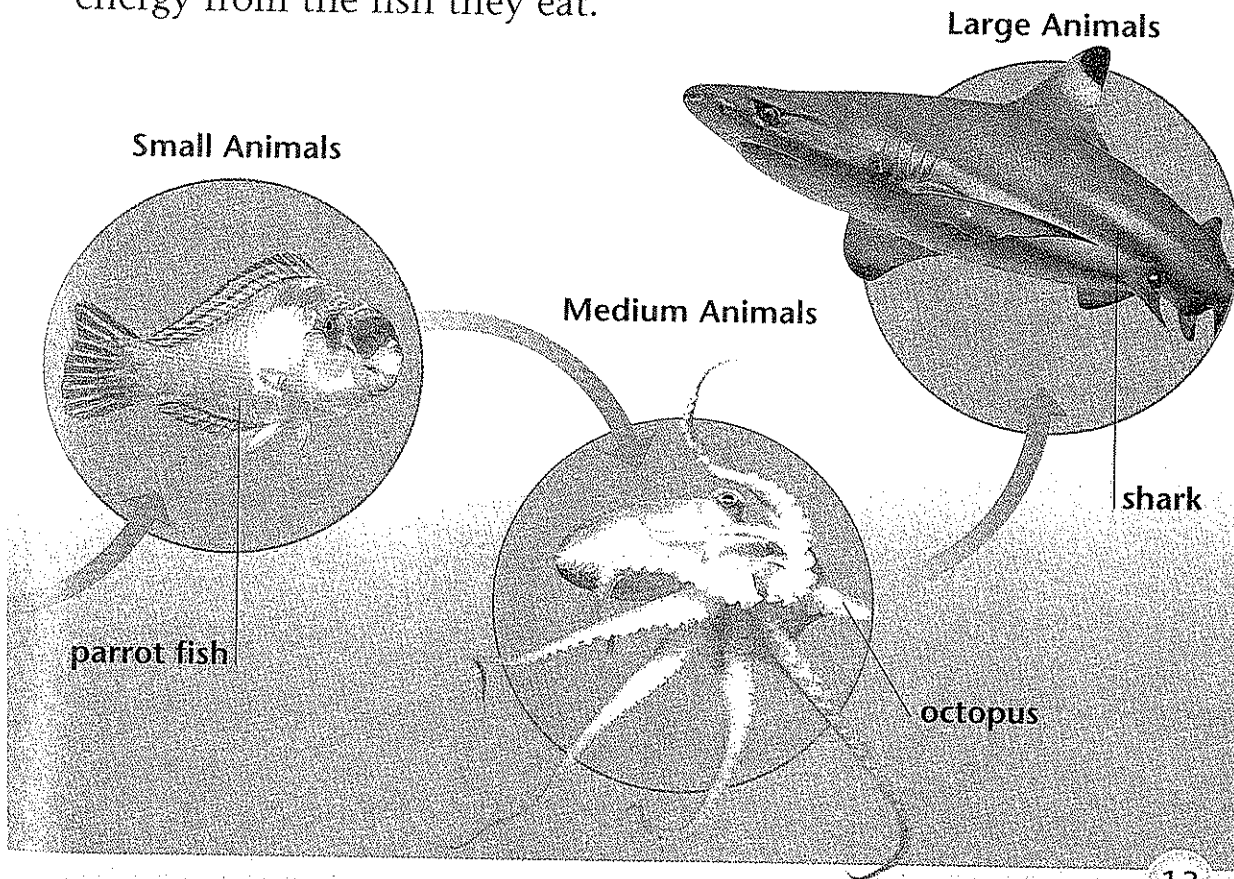
## Coral Reef Food Chain

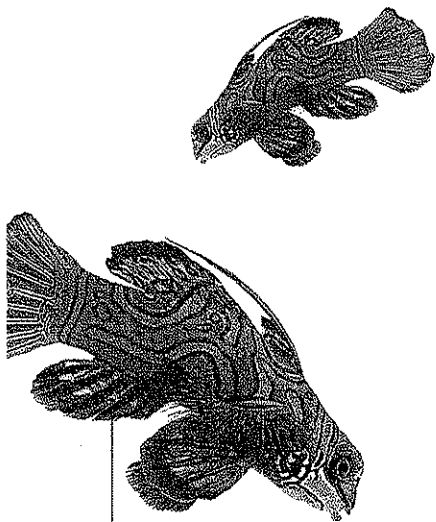


## The Coral Reef Food Chain

Coral reef creatures are part of a **food chain**. A food chain is the way that living things gain nourishment. On a reef, a food chain starts with algae and plankton. Algae make food using the energy from sunlight. The energy in food is passed along the food chain.

Some fish eat plankton, including algae, for energy and nourishment. Then, larger fish and animals eat these fish. These larger fish and animals are called **predators** because they hunt and kill other animals for food. The predators gain their energy from the fish they eat.



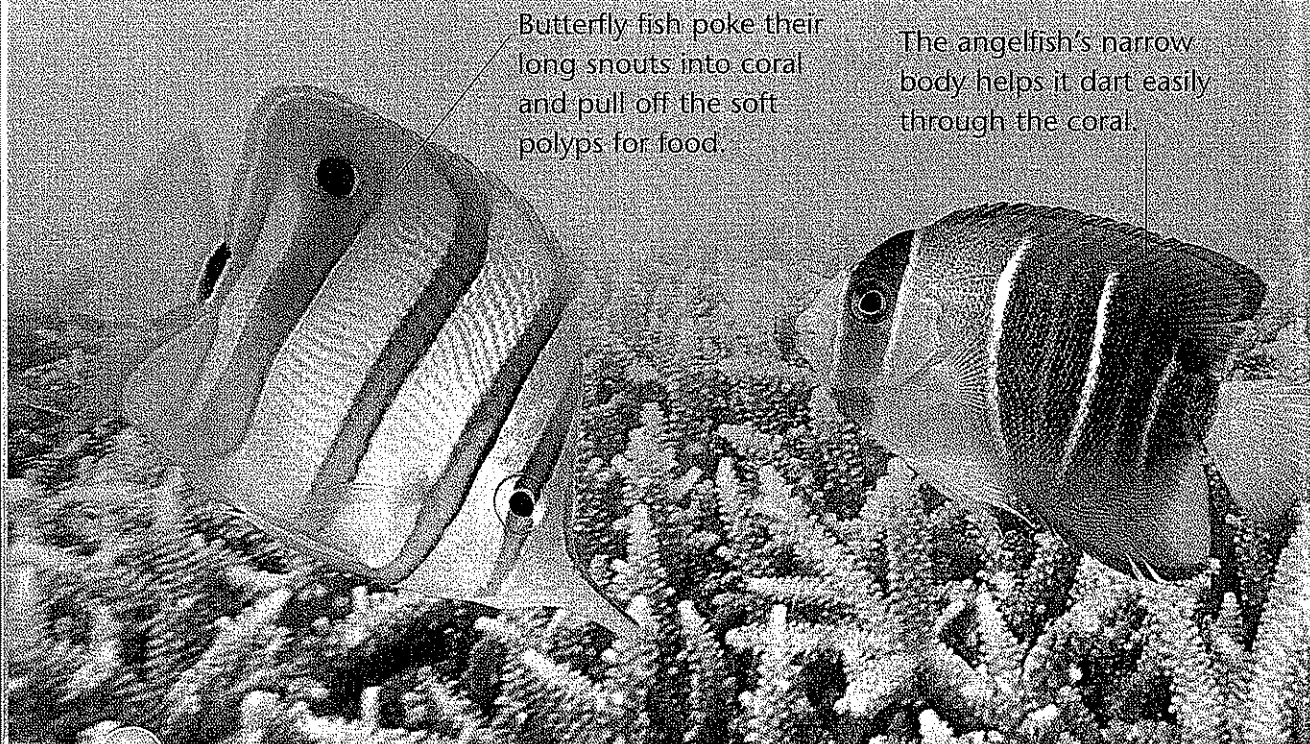


Mandarin fish are some of the most colorful fish on the reef.

## Fish of the Coral Reef

Nearly one-third of the world's species of fish live in coral reefs. Most coral reef fish are brilliantly colored. In the crowded reef, these colors help the fish to recognize their own kind. Colors, shapes, markings, and other features help fish to find food, hide, and defend themselves.

The mandarin fish is covered with bright orange, yellow, blue, and green stripes and dots. The mandarin's colors warn large fish to stay away from it. It is also covered with a bad-tasting slime.



Butterfly fish poke their long snouts into coral and pull off the soft polyps for food.

The angelfish's narrow body helps it dart easily through the coral.

A butterfly fish has clever markings as well as vivid colors. A black spot near its tail looks like an eye. It confuses predators and helps the fish escape.

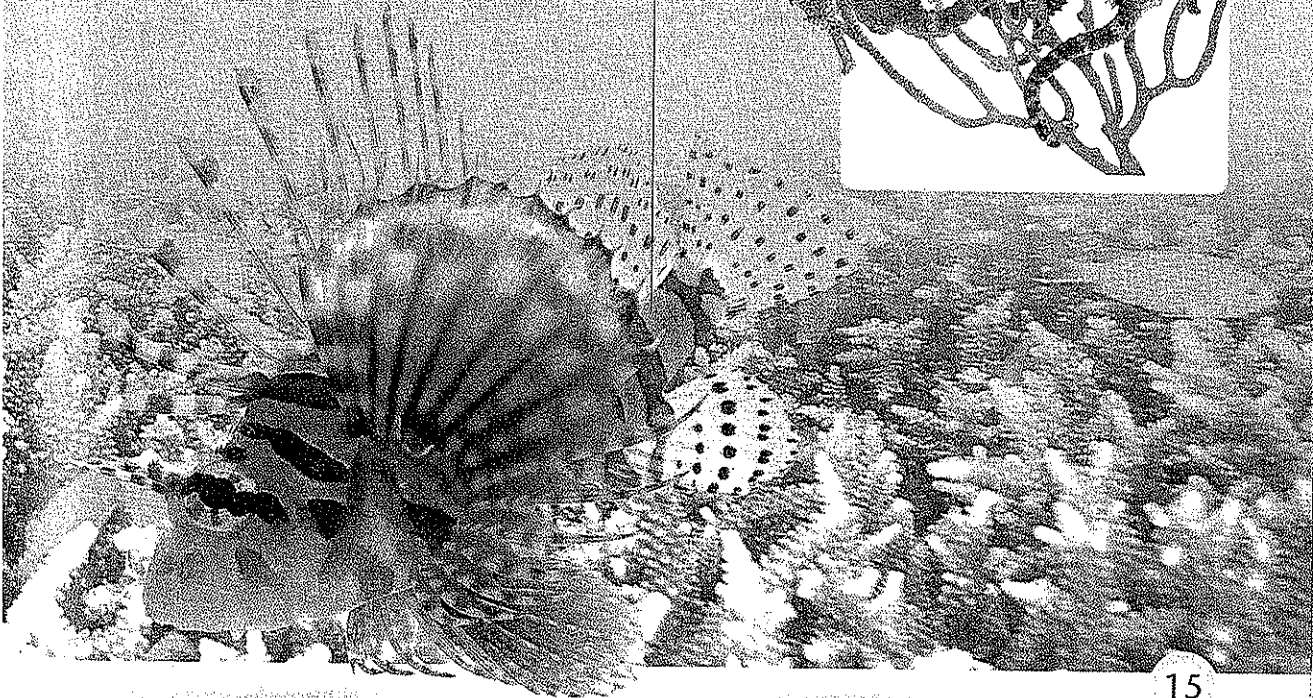
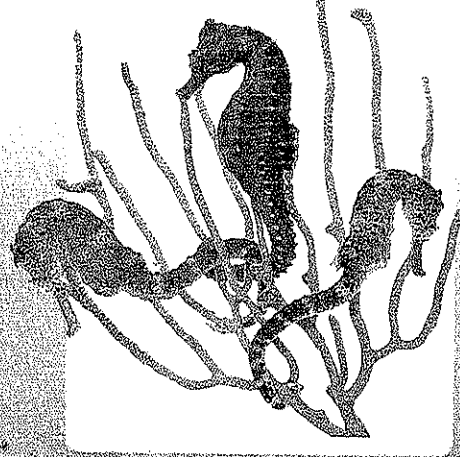
The bright colors of an angelfish attract a mate. Mated pairs stay together and, like guard dogs, chase other angelfish from their territory.

The lionfish has spines that stick out like a lion's mane. The spines hold a powerful poison. Predators stay away so they won't get poisoned.

### Hiding for Safety

A sea horse wraps its tail around coral and stays in the same place for long periods of time. It can't swim quickly away from predators. Instead it protects itself with **camouflage**. It changes color to match the coral where it rests.

The lionfish's bright colors act as a warning. Watch out for poisonous spines!





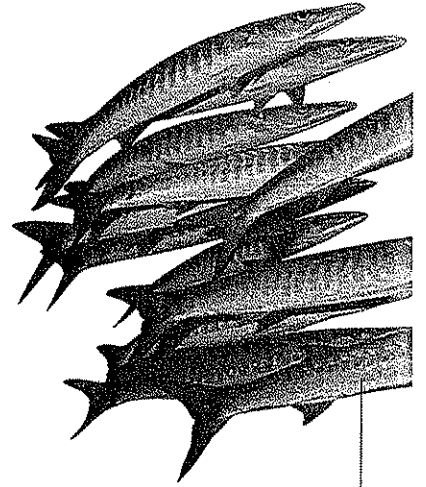
## Predators of the Coral Reef

Sharks, barracudas, manta rays, and moray eels are among the largest predators of the coral reef. Each has a different way of hunting prey. Moray eels hide in caves, and then rush out to snatch up lobsters, crabs, and fish.

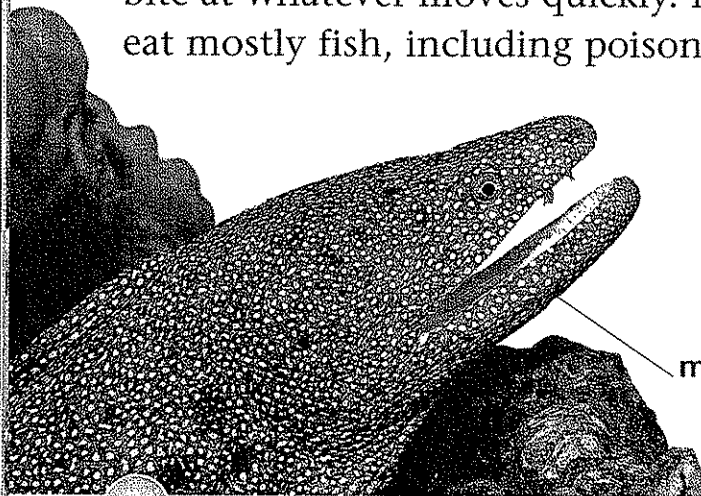
Reef sharks eat similar creatures. They hunt at night, swimming over the surface of the reef to catch their prey. Like moray eels, sharks use smell, sight, and sense vibrations in the water to find their prey.

The manta ray was once known to sailors as a “devil fish” because of the “horns” on its head. These “horns” are actually fins that guide plankton and shrimp into its wide mouth.

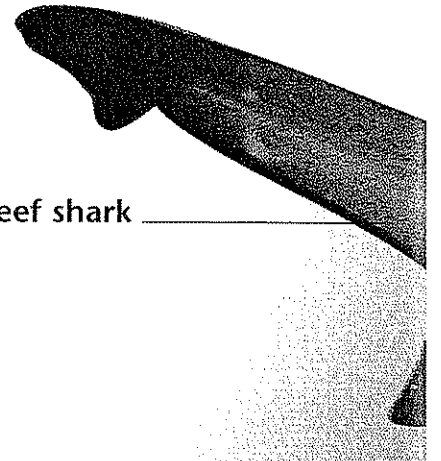
Barracudas often hunt in groups, or schools. They use their razor-sharp teeth to bite at whatever moves quickly. Barracudas eat mostly fish, including poisonous ones.



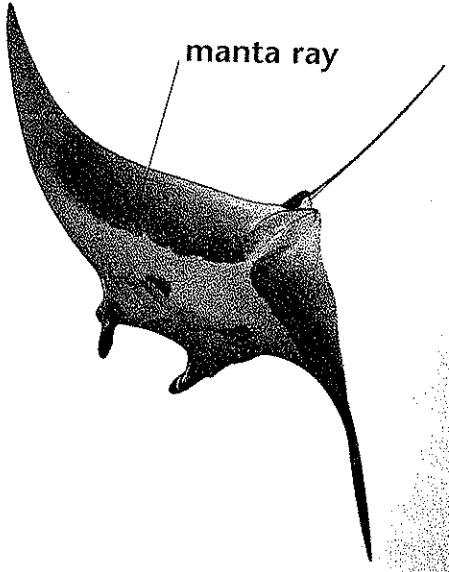
barracuda



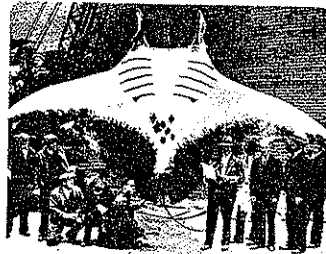
moray eel



reef shark



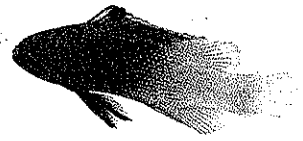
manta ray



### Massive Manta

This picture shows the size of a manta ray as compared to humans. It can stretch more than 20 feet wide and can weigh more than 2 tons.

# Glossary



|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>algae</b>          | plantlike creatures that grow in the water and use sunlight to make food   |
| <b>atoll reefs</b>    | ring-shaped reefs around a lagoon  |
| <b>barrier reefs</b>  | reefs along the shore that are separated from the land by a lagoon         |
| <b>camouflage</b>     | a disguise to blend with the surroundings                                  |
| <b>coral polyps</b>   | individual coral animals   |
| <b>coral reefs</b>    | platforms or ridges of coral at or near the ocean surface                  |
| <b>exoskeleton</b>    | a hard outer covering supporting an animal's insides                       |
| <b>food chain</b>     | the passing of food energy between members of a community of living things |
| <b>fringing reefs</b> | reefs that form along shorelines   |
| <b>habitats</b>       | places where animals and plants live together                              |
| <b>lagoon</b>         | an area of shallow water separated from the sea                            |
| <b>parasites</b>      | creatures that benefit by living in or on other creatures, which they harm |
| <b>plankton</b>       | tiny plants and animals floating in the ocean                              |
| <b>predators</b>      | animals that hunt and kill other animals for food                          |
| <b>scavengers</b>     | animals that eat dead animals  |
| <b>symbiosis</b>      | a partnership that benefits two different kinds of living things           |
| <b>tentacles</b>      | long, flexible body parts, such as octopus arms                            |
| <b>test</b>           | a hard external covering on certain animals, such as sea urchins           |